

Working for OUR community

Martin Looney

REVITALIZING DOWNTOWN NEW HAVEN

For the last several years I have been an advocate for the construction of a downtown campus for Gateway Community College and for state support of moving the Long Wharf Theatre to a downtown location. These efforts and those of my fellow New Haven legislators and the City administration achieved success with the announcement that the state will provide \$140 million for Gateway, \$30 million toward construction of the new theatre, and \$10 million for additional downtown parking. The relocation of the Long Wharf Theatre to downtown will make this valuable New Haven cultural institution more accessible, and consolidating the two existing Gateway campuses is an important part of our effort to ensure that quality educational opportunities are available to local residents.

A BUDGET TO MEET THE STATE'S NEEDS

Our revised budget restores the maximum property tax credit against the personal income tax to \$500 for income years starting on or after January 1, 2005, after a reduction to \$350 due to last year's budget crisis. Other initiatives include the following: \$88.2 million in additional grants to towns including substantial increases in state aid for New Haven and Hamden above the levels proposed by the governor; \$4.6 million to reduce the number of people on the Department of Mental Retardation's (DMR) waiting list for residential support and services; \$5 million for private social service providers operating under contracts with DMR and the departments of Children and Families, Mental Health and Addiction Services, Corrections, and other state agencies; \$14.25 million to repeal the Medicaid co-payments enacted last year and \$17.69 million to restore the Medicaid benefit package and eliminate proposed premiums; \$1.5 million to eliminate the ConnPACE asset test and estate recovery requirements; an additional \$1 million in financial aid for students at the state's public and private colleges and universities; \$13.4 million to enhance justice and prisoner recidivism reduction efforts, including funding for more drug treatment and halfway house beds and probation officers; and \$3.4 million to add more state troopers.

GOOD SCHOOLS

Students will benefit from a number of school building projects that are started or planned all across the district. With substantial assistance from the state, construction has begun on the new Hamden Middle School and the General Assembly passed legislation that renews our commitment to provide over \$200 million for other school construction projects that serve area children.

IMPROVED PUBLIC SAFETY

In April, the town of Hamden was allocated \$400,000 by the State Bond Commission to assist in costs associated with a separate, new police station and a separate, new fire station. This is necessary because Hamden needs new public safety facilities and the original plan for a combined facility was determined to be unfeasible.

SUMMER 2004

Dear Friend:

Recently, the Connecticut General Assembly completed its 2004 legislative session, my second as Majority Leader of the state Senate. I am pleased to report that we were able to pass important legislation to keep Connecticut a great place to live and work.

We were particularly successful in three areas: ethics reform, environmental protection, and responsible budgeting that increased aid to municipalities, restored the property tax credit on your state income tax, and began the crucial task of repairing the social services safety net for the poorest of the poor.

These successes were achieved during a session made difficult by the controversy surrounding former Governor Rowland that threatened to distract and polarize the General Assembly. The House Select Committee of Inquiry deserves praise for the fair, bipartisan way in which they conducted their business. And, with Rowland's resignation, this chapter in Connecticut politics closes.

I hope that you find this newsletter informative. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Martin Looney

Martin M. Looney
State Senate Majority Leader



From your State Senator

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STATE SENATOR
Martin M. Looney



*Continuing to Work
for Connecticut's Future*



In April, my colleagues and I honored the members of both 2004 national champion UConn Husky teams and their coaches (including Jim Calhoun, above) at the State Capitol.

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

Several initiatives to protect our environment were passed by the General Assembly this year. A bill to reduce the emissions from new cars and trucks will help reduce air pollution. Another measure will establish regional greenhouse gas emission reduction goals and require the state to develop a plan to meet them. In addition, a significant new law strengthens the way we regulate and locate new power lines to enhance public health and public safety. Finally, a new provision gives the Department of Environmental Protection additional powers when considering an application to build a construction and demolition waste transfer station.

MORE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Easing congestion on Connecticut's highways and promoting the use of public transportation is one of our state's priorities. Last year we passed landmark legislation to augment our public transportation infrastructure. This year, to continue our commitment to easing congestion and helping commuters get off the roadways we passed legislation authorizing the use of \$25 million in special transportation bonds. These bonds will be used to purchase new cars for the Metro-North fleet, allowing more people to get on board with public transportation.

MAKING MEDICARE AND CONNPACE BETTER

New federal Medicare prescription drug coverage began on June 1. For the next eighteen months, this coverage will take the form of privately-offered discount cards that will provide a range of discounts on needed drugs, and will also provide \$600 of assistance to low-income elderly to help them pay for what is not covered. Here in Connecticut, for almost twenty years, we have proudly offered comprehensive prescription drug coverage for qualifying elderly and disabled through ConnPACE. This law coordinates ConnPACE with the new Medicare benefit, to help reduce confusion among those who will have both benefits.

Participants will be able to have just one card to present at their pharmacies; a computer system will determine whether Medicare or ConnPACE is responsible for paying, and what, if any, co-payment is owed by the participants. ConnPACE recipients will never have to pay more than their current co-payment, and may pay less. This much-needed law will ensure better integration of the programs and maintain patients' access to prescription drugs, without causing undue confusion on the part of recipients. If you would like more information, please call ConnPACE at 1-800-423-5026, or Medicare at 1-800-633-4227.

MEDICAL MALPRACTICE

After receiving complaints from many physicians about skyrocketing medical malpractice insurance rates, we conducted a thorough nonpartisan review of the issue. Then, based upon those recommendations and some bipartisan legislative recommendations, we put together a comprehensive reform bill designed to reduce malpractice insurance rates while protecting patients' access to quality healthcare. This reform package includes increased patient safety measures, judicial reforms such as requiring mediation between the parties in order to expedite these often-lengthy cases and reduce attorney costs, and requiring our state Insurance Commissioner to consider companies' proposed rates before they are applied. Additionally, it would help doctors most hit by escalating rates by allowing them a credit on their state income taxes, which puts money directly back into their pockets. This balanced approach addresses the issues brought to us by the insurance companies, doctors and lawyers involved in these cases, and most importantly, works to improve the safety of patients in our state. Both chambers approved this legislation, but unfortunately the Governor decided to veto this bill.

REGIONAL PROBATE COURT SERVICES FOR CHILDREN'S MATTERS

Each day, numerous cases concerning the welfare of children are heard in various probate courts throughout the state. Often, these cases involve issues of guardianship, adoption, emancipation and the termination of parental rights. Because these issues are so complex and important, we've created a pilot program establishing a regional probate court. We've passed legislation authorizing a specialized probate court dedicated solely to hearing cases pertaining to children's matters. The Court will be situated in New Haven and include 9 other cities and towns in the area. By combining resources, children and families will be linked with important services and support to intervene at the onset of their problems, thus providing a more comprehensive approach to issues concerning child welfare.



**Restoring Trust
in Government &
Public Officials**

Given the scandals involving the Rowland administration, we realized the time was now to implement key reforms to the state's ethics laws. I was proud to co-sponsor legislation that makes the Ethics Commission—whose funding former Governor

Rowland attempted to cut a year ago—much stronger, by increasing its membership from seven to nine and prohibiting the governor from proposing budget cuts to the commission before the legislature considers them. The Ethics Commission is the watchdog organization designed to investigate alleged violations of the state's ethics codes.

We also approved legislation that stiffens the penalties against those who violate the state's ethics code. The bill as summarized by the Office of Legislative Research increases the statute of limitations for ethics violations from three to five years for elected officials and lobbyists, increases the civil penalties for ethics code violations from \$2,000 to \$10,000, makes it a criminal act (Class D Felony—punishable by up to five years in prison and/or a fine of up to \$5,000) to intentionally violate the state ethics code, and doubles the time, from 90 days to 180 days, that the state has to bring action to void certain contracts that were entered into in violation of the state ethics code. These are essential measures to restoring the public trust that the current administration has damaged, and I was proud to be able to support them.

In addition, we strengthened controls on the awarding of state contracts by establishing a two-phase process for awarding building construction, procurement, or service contracts, leases or licensing arrangements valued at over \$500,000. Phase I runs until June 30, 2006 and prohibits any state or quasi-public agency from executing a large state contract unless it receives an affidavit from the people who bid on and were awarded the contract regarding 'gifts' given to agency officials or employees involved in soliciting or awarding it. Also in Phase I agency officials/employees must certify that their selection was not the result of collusion, gifts, compensation, fraud or other inappropriate influence. Phase II begins July 1, 2006 and prohibits any state or quasi-public agency from executing a large state contract unless it and the contract recipient certify that there was no fraud or collusion and that no gifts were exchanged from the date contract planning began to the date the contract was executed.